DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 129 CS 502 184

AUTHOR Stupp, Vicki O'Donnell
TITLE Analysis of Film as Communication.
PUB DATE Jul 75
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Summer Conference on Mass Communication in Education and Society (Austin, Texas, July 10-12, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiences; *Behavior Change; *Changing Attitudes; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Films; Identification (Psychological); Media Research; *Persuasive Discourse; Sensory Experience; Symbolism

ABSTRACT

Films function as a persuasive process in that they bring about a reinforcement or change in attitude, belief, or behavior by producing a cognitive restructuring of the audience's frame of reference. Organized research into the effects of films falls into two categories: macro-media studies exploring the way films reflect the psychological preoccupations of the members of a particular culture and micro-media studies using small-scale studies to determine the effects of film on audiences. A number of the latter deal with the measureable effects that films have on audience attitude and behavior. These studies indicate that films can affect audiences through the following: the identification of subjects with screen characters perceived as similar to themselves; interaction-the connection the viewer makes between personal experiences and the film events; composition-the emotionally moving aspects of the technical presentation of the film; suspension of disbelief-the film's convincing reconstruction of reality; and symbolism and archetypes-the use of symbols to stimulate images in the unconscious of the audience. (HAI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED157129

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Analysis of Film as Communication

Vicki O'Donnell Stupp

North Texas State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Vicki O'Donnell Stupp

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

1975 Speech Communication Association Summer Conference on MASS COMMUNICATION IN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY, July 10-12, 1975, Austin, Texas

CS502184

Analysis of Film as Communication

Vicki O'Donnell Stupp

North Texas State University

Unlike most of the other speakers in the MASSCOM '75 part of this conference, I do not come directly from the area of mass communications. Instead, my background is rhetoric, more specifically, persuasion. Now this does not bother me, for our whole field of speech communication is made up of many ideas, theories, and studies from other disciplines. Indeed, film may be the most interdisciplinary area of all, for it draws upon so many resources and kinds of people. I think that it is healthy, even necessary, to engage in interdisciplinary studies, to draw upon the ideas and materials of many kinds of analysts, theorists, and practitioners for new developments, methodologies, and information. Interdisciplinary studies give our related fields new vigor and also let us explore our weaknesses. I have always thought that what Benjamin Disraeli said of Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister of England in the nineteenth century, was more of a compliment than an insult which, of course, Disraeli intended it to be when he said that Peel was a robber of others' intellects, that his life was one great Appropriation Clause. But Peel, as we know, was a great statesman who even incorporated the ideas of his political opposition when he thought it was for the good of his country.

Today, I would like to examine film as communication and attempt to answer the question, "What and how does film communicate?" Film is communication in which meaning is the result of a relationship between the implication of the filmmakers, the senders, and the inference of the audience, the receivers. Visual communication in film includes the transmission of signals which are received primarily through visual receptors. When received, the signals are often treated as a message.

The filmmakers (i.e., the producers, directors, writers, editors, camerapersons, actors, and other technicians and artists) employ selected symbols to communicate a message when they make decisions about the elements which enter into making a film--the script, location, cast, natural sound, dialogue, music, lens, camera setups, staging, composition, and editing. They sort, select, and transmit symbols through the medium of film to the audience with the hope that it will receive the message in a way that is similar to what is intended by the senders. The senders seek a voluntary cooperation of the receivers through a symbolic interaction with them. In turn, the receivers select and sort the meanings derived from the film through their perceptual-interpretative capabilities and place them into their own system of cognitive feelings with varying degrees of intensity.

The audience's response to a film is part of the significant convergence of sender and receiver which brings a film to realization. Audiences bring to the film many variables--differing values, opinions, beliefs, attitudes and behavioral patterns--which will affect their responses to it. Filmmakers often calculate the predispositions of the audience in order to produce some behavioral response. The profit motive induces producers to adapt to audience interests in order to promote attendance and increase box office receipts. One prosperous producer, Dino de Laurentiis, explains, "Success is in isolating certain trends in which the public has a deep emotional interest."[1] Market research is in use at Universal, Columbia, and Twentieth Century Fox Studios where the plots of films, possible casting, and advertising of films are pre-tested. As David Begelman, head of Columbia Studios, says, "We're not about to put a message in a bottle, toss it in the sea and hope that it will reach its destination."[2] Even Alfred Hitchcock expresses his dependency on relating to audience interests and expectations when making decisions about directing a film: "The art of directing for the commercial market," says Hitchcock, "is to know just how far you can go. In many ways I am freer now to do what I want to do than I was a few years ago. I hope in time to have more freedom still--if audiences will give it to me."[3]

The public in turn projects its interests back to the film, and this response, real or imagined, is known as <u>feedback</u>. The audience response to a film has no effect on the specific film itself after it is released, and thus the film, unlike a live performer, remains indifferent to its immediate audience. Yet, the film and the audience have to connect in some way. The experiences which films portray have to be <u>shared</u> experiences between the audience and the characters and events in the film. As George Linden says in <u>Reflections on the Screen</u>, the persona of the actor on the screen is implicated with our persona. "Our relation to the film figure is intimate."[4] Through film, an audience can see its values personified, renew familiar experiences and feelings, fulfill desires, and find relief from tensions and release from fears. Hugh D. Duncan, a sociologist with special interests in art forms and rhetoric, says that film provides viewers with the "imagery of common values, the common consummatory experiences as well as with compensations for our defeats, our inferiorities, and our unconfessed failures. The average film brings to light the hidden unsatisfied longings of the average man and woman."[5] In order to provoke shared experiences and unsatisifed longings of an audience, filmmakers make choices selected literally from what Aristotle called "all of the available means of persuasion."

Persuasion is a communicative process which attempts to bring about a reinforcement or a change of attitude, belief, or behavior by producing a cognitive restructuring of one's image of the world or of one's frame of reference. The desired response to a persuasive message is "I never thought of it that way before" or "I agree but

now I feel more strongly about it than I did before." To persuade is to stimulate, i.e., to reinforce an attitude or to renew a behavior, to convince, i.e., to change an attitude, or to motivate, i.e., to cause a new behavior. The intended and resulting purpose depends upon the predispositions of the audience and a multitude of elements within a person's life space--his or her experiences, values, attitudes, group norms, and perceptual and reasoning abilities.

Not all filmmakers consciously attempt to persuade audiences to change attitudes and behaviors, or even to intensify ones that are already in agreement with the messages on the screen. But if we define persuasion as an attempt to get an audience to accept the persuader's view of reality or fantasy, which is another way of eliciting the "I never thought of it that way before" response, then most films fall under the persuasive domain.

Persuasion is not easily accomplished, for audiences can be resistant to change even while viewing a film when their defenses may be weakened or when they have expectations of only being entertained. Yet, many film theorists believe that film may be the most persuasive form of all media. Béla Balázs says in his introduction to Theory of the Film, "We all know and admit that film art has a greater influence on the minds of the general public than any other art."[6] Paul Rotha, a British film critic and documentary filmmaker, also expresses the same idea in Documentary Film: "So omnipresent has the film become that it must be regarded as one of the most influential factors in the guidance of public thought, for there is scarcely a sphere of social life today in which its influence is absent."[7] Vladimir Petric, Professor of Film at Harvard, sees film as "the most appropriate and powerful means of ideological communication and political intervention."[8] He attributes film's persuasive potential to the filmmakers, consciously or unconsciously, taking sides during the process of planning and shooting their films.

Whether or not filmmakers deliberately intend to persuade is not always clear since the desire to persuade, when present, may be secondary, unconscious, or even deliberately masked. Whatever its intent, however, it can at the very least be said that film can function persuasively for the audience. It is unlikely, however, that a film will persuade all viewers. As there is disagreement with public speeches, there will be disagreement over the persuasive effectiveness of film. Nonetheless, there is evidence that film has been a stimulus for both attitudinal and behavioral changes in audiences.

Marshall McLuhan relates an interesting example of the effect of American films on the people of another culture. President Sukarno of Indonesia told a large group of Hollywood executives in 1956 that he regarded them as political radicals and revolutionaries who were responsible for political change in the East because what the people of the Orient saw in Hollywood films was a world in which all the ordinary people had cars and electric stoves and refrigerators. Sukarno objected to this because he said that the Oriental now regards himself as an ordinary person who has been deprived of the ordinary man's birthright.[9]

Ronald H. Carpenter and Robert V. Seltzer present considerable secondary evidence to support their argument that the film Patton had a profound effect upon Richard M. Nixon and may have influenced his decision to invade Cambodia in 1970. They claim that the film led the President to believe that the true American spirit followed Patton and not the New Left, a belief on Nixon's part that was "felt by every close advisor who was aware of the President's repeated viewing of the film."[10] They attribute much of the influence to the rhetorical identification which they believe Nixon had with Patton due to "similarities in sensations, ideas, values, and attitudes that are demonstrated symbolically between the parties in a suasory transition such as that between a film and its viewer."[11]

Jacob P. Mayer, a sociologist, offered a series of cast studies of British audiences' responses to film and concluded that film often served as a vehicle for making individuals aware of their own personalities.[12] Various surveys in American colleges and universities[13] which ask why young people go to see films have often yielded responses which indicate that youth seek and find a means of self-analysis and a stimulus for communication with their partners through films. As Anthony Schillaci, of the New School for Social Research, says, "Revelation of self to the other is often occasioned by a good film."[14]

Organized research into the effects of film can be classified into two categories: macro-media and micro-media studies. Macro-media studies have concentrated on trying to analyze the ways which given cultural configurations relate to certain characteristics of the societies in which they occur. This type of research which is conducted through concent analysis explores the ways in which film reflects the psychological preoccupations of the members of a particular culture. The effect of films is regarded as reciprocal to the socially determined needs of the audience, for film is considered as a cultural product through which individuals find affirmation or negation related to their tensions and needs. The term "need" refers to the experiences which an individual seeks beyond that which is furnished in his or her immediate environment in order to better understand himself or herself and the environment. Franklin Fearing, in his review of the effects of film on audiences, says, "Motion pictures achieve their effect because they help the individual to cognize his world."[16] Fearing discusses filmic persuasion as a means of providing a person with interpretative frames of reference which "either reaffirm the norms of his culture or group or reveal previously unsuspected and possibly contrasting alternatives to these norms. He sees how other people behave in a wide variety of situations and is thus provided with patterns of behavior which he may accept or reject . . . . The 'need' is not necessarily consciously experienced by the individual, but is assumed to underlie his behavior in seeking the entertainment or amusement provided by the motion picture. It finds expression in the pattern of his acceptances or rejections, approvals or disapprovals, of specific films."[17]

There are also numerous micro-media studies which have utilized experimental methodologies and small scale research projects to determine the effects of film on audiences. Micro-media studies usually use verbal instruments such as Cloze procedure, contingency analysis, and semantic differential tests to determine the effects of

film. On the basis of evidence from many research studies done over the last forty years, it is possible to demonstrate that film has some measurable effects on specific attitudes of those exposed to it, provided a measuring instrument is devised for it, and provided the audience has sufficient interest in it to give it sustained attention.

The Payne Fund studies which were conducted by a number of sociologists and psychologists and sponsored by the U. S. Motion Picture Research Council were the first systematic attempt which used experimental techniques to find out the effects of commercial films on specific attitudes and behavior. The general conclusions of the studies were that films had definite and measurable effects on attitudes and behavior, particularly in the case of children and adolescents.[18] Herbert Blumer found that children imitated the action of film stars and that the films produced heightened emotions of fear, sorrow, and passion.[19] Ruth Peterson and L. L. Thurstone observed statistically significant shifts in the attitudes of adolescents toward capital punishment, race relations, and Nazism after exposure to films such as Birth of a Nation, Sons of the Gods, and Welcome Danger which dealt with these subjects. They administered pre-tests and post-tests after a lapse of time. The attitude shifts were in the direction indicated by the film as a result of the exposure to it. In the case of at least one group, the effects persisted in a significant amount for a period of five months. Of the thirteen films which were viewed, however, only six produced significant attitude changes.[20]

M. Wiese and S. Cole used a free association technique and had 300 children answer questions regarding the ideological points in the film, Tomorrow the World, before and after viewing the film. Measureable effects on attitudes in the direction indicated by the film were observed; however, the effects of the film were proportionate to the social, economic, and cultural origins of the individual subjects. This particular study documented an important generalization: that the socio-economic backgrounds of the audience determine in large measure what a film means.[21]

M. Keilhacker investigated the pedagogical effects of film on children and found that they learned values about truth, honesty, and behavior from film long before they went to school. He said that children are not spectators of film, but are co-actors.[22]

Both Leonard Berkowitz, who has been testing adolescents and young adults, and Albert Bandura, who has been testing children, have engaged in very careful, piece-by-piece experimental research on the causal relationship between filmed aggression and behavior for more than a decade. Although both Berkowitz and Bandura and their colleagues were very careful to remind us that they make no claim to any situation outside of the laboratory, they found that film violence can incite violent behavior in viewers. Berkowitz said that "film violence may well increase the probability that someone in the audience will behave aggressively in a later situation [if] the fantasy situation appears socially justified."[23] He also indicated that repeated exposure to film violence increases the probability of subsequent aggressive acts for some members of the audience, but other factors also determine what may happen--how aggressive the subject is, how hostile the film makes him or her, how much he or she associates the story in the film with situations in which he or she learned hostile behavior, and the intensity of guilt and/or aggression

anxiety aroused by the exposure to the film.[24] Bandura also found that children, under certain conditions, are apt to reproduce aggressive action after observing adults exhibit novel aggressive action on the screen.[25] Reviews of their extensive research lead us to the conclusion that sometimes film may be persuasively effective with the attitude changes consisting more often of modifications than of conversions. With respect to behavior changes, it can be generalized that some types of depicted violence will be found to have some types of effects on the aggression levels of some types of children under some types of conditions. As with other forms of communication, the film audience is influenced partly by what it selects from what is presented to it.

From a rhetorical standpoint, one of the most interesting aspects of the experimental evidence concerning the relationship between film and audience attitude and behavior change is that subjects tend to be more influenced by screen characters which the viewers perceive as similar to themselves. Berkowitz uses the rhetorical term "identification" when he talks about implicit role-taking on the part of the subjects, and he, along with William J. McGuire, P.H. Tannenbaum, E. P. Geer, and Walter Weiss,[26] has found that viewer identification is the central concept in the interpretation of film effects. The extent to which viewers rated themselves as similar to particular film characters influenced their reactions to the aggressors in the films.

People identify with the images in films because the filmmakers express the feelings of an audience, not to us, but for us. Identification occurs in communication when the sender and receiver reach deep communion. Kenneth Burke, the rhetorician, explains in his A Rhetoric of Motives: "You persuade a man only in so far as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."[27] This is done through evoking in the audience a sense of collaboration with the sender, or, in the case of film, with the film characters. There is an emotional overlap between the characters on the screen with the viewers' experiences in real life. It is a visual common ground which stresses similarities between the human subjects of the film and the target audience. Associations are created which connect to the viewers' inner environment. Our minds, like films, perceive discontinuity of time and space. We engage in past, present, and future through thinking, fantasizing, and daydreaming. As we respond to various stimuli, we reach back into our memories to make connections, to extend and confirm previous knowledge, in an attempt to understand ourselves better. Events transcend time and space and are brought together in our consciousness. Sidney Lumet's The Pawnbroker visually reproduced the sensations which can occur in our minds when we connect images in time and space. He used very short intercuts of flashbacks to the past of the pawnbroker who tried to obliterate his past and his memories of the Nazi concentration camp twenty-five years earlier. The present tense sequences of the film were interrupted by flickering inserts, some only six or eight frames long. These inserts produced flickering sensations at first and they lasted for progressively longer intervals until the present was suspended and the past took over. Rather than using a simple cut to a flashback, Lumet used the flickering technique to depict the pawnbroker's desire to repress his memories, a struggle which his conscious mind lost. Likewise, the viewer has flickering sensations when parts of a film act as a stimulus.

A person responds to those things in a film which he or she finds significant for him or herself. The story of a film overlaps with the viewer's experiences in life. Life's variety comes not from the duration of an experience, but from its intensity. We seek confirmation of ourselves in film and thus find a reflection of ourselves on the screen.

The dramatic film usually provokes a reaction from the spectator which depends upon a projection of his or her character and personality into those of the actor or actress playing in the story. The spectator is also projected into a series of fictional complications with vested interest in the outcome. A film can give an aura of reality to notions, situations, and things that may be essentially unreal. Thus, "life" can be worked out as we would like it to be but seldom is. The Russian poet Moravsky expresses the appeal of the dramatic film: "For those whom life has cheated, movies open the electric paradise."

Yet, there has to be a connection between the "paradise" and the world which the audience inhabits, between the characteristics of the characters in the film and the audience. The connection comes through shared experiences, however remote they may be, between the film's characters and events and the personal lives and wishes of the audience. Shared experiences are strong identification factors. In a persuasive speech, a speaker may describe an experience with the hope of gaining an empathic response such as "I know what you mean; something like that happened to me once." Likewise, in a film, an audience gains meaning and often pleasure by relating to the characters. They share their feelings, if they like them, or project negative feelings toward them, if they dislike them. The audience shares feelings and is concerned for certain characters in certain predicaments. These frames of reference are to a body of overt and covert feelings, assumptions, value-judgments, which filmmakers expect an audience to share and through which they can express feelings <u>for</u> them. Familiar properties on the screen are extensions of our being. The more familiar they are, the more we become a part of them. Film brings people into the presence of a certain image of themselves. Perhaps this is why Luchino Visconti, the Italian film director, says, "Experience has taught me that the weight, the presence of a man is the only thing that really counts on the screen. . . . I could make a film in front of a blank wall if I was sure of finding the real human elements of the character placed in front of this bare decor."[28]

Petric sees the identification power of film as stronger than any other medium, and he believes that identification is a deliberate weapon in persuasion: "Knowing that viewers become psychologically tied to the total illusion on the screen, the filmmaker can easily direct their attention and incite their attitude, injecting into their consciousness certain political concepts; he may trust that--if the audience's identification is complete--three quarters of the viewers will assimilate the ideological standpoint of the hero."[29]

Documentary film, regardless of its claims to objectivity, is also very persuasive. Through its factors of identification, it can sensitize the viewers' perceptions and provide a stimulus which can influence an audience to adopt a point of view or support a solution to a problem. Documentary filmmakers utilize the predispositions and experiences of

their audiences to evoke identification with the people and events on the screen. Paul Rotha says, "Documentary relies exclusively on the belief that there is nothing so interesting to ourselves as ourselves. It depends upon the individual's interest in the world around him. It bases its appeal on the community's undeniable zest for getting about the world and, more difficult, on the drama of events that lies at one's own doorstep."[30] The characters and events in a documentary film are familiar to its audience. An idea is explored through a series of experiences which the audience can share, and these experiences form the basic structure of a documentary film.

A good documentary film makes the commonplace as interesting as the exotic. Robert Flaherty went to Hudson Bay to film the emblem of primitive man, Nanook of the North. Nanook, an Eskimo, battles the elements of the frozen North in a struggle for survival; yet, because Flaherty focused on ordinary events, building an igloo, a family sleeping together, children taking medicine, a baby playing with a puppy, audiences have reacted with warmth and humor to people with whom they can identify. Thus, it becomes not a condescending treatment of a primitive, but a compassionate look at human beings, a universal story in which we are all Eskimos. Flaherty's film is a good documentary because it is a subjective revelation of the human experience, human events portrayed on a human scale.

An academy award winning documentary, The Great American Cowboy, evoked great identification in a film audience in Denton, Texas, a city surrounded by many small communities which are the home towns of local and national rodeo contestants. The audience, families who had driven to the theater in pick-up trucks, dressed in jeans held up by belts with buckles representative of winning rodeo events from Junior rodeos to Grand Championship rodeos, overtly expressed identification when the physical punishment of bull riding, bronc busting, and steer wrestling was depicted in agonizing slow motion. Shots of recognition were given to cowboys crowded in seedy motel rooms sharing tales of mean bulls. Sleepy contestants traveling all night in old cars, stopping for greasy food in cheap roadside cafes were given instant acknowledgment. Members of the audience groaned when Larry Mahan, the All-Around Champion Cowboy, broke his shoulder, and they murmured understanding when he took off his cast two weeks early in order to participate in an important rodeo event.

Film, whether dramatic or documentary, can be a powerful instrument of persuasion which can enlarge our experiences and change perceptions of self and the environment so that we can say "I never thought of it that way before." It is through such interaction, a connection between the viewer's experiences and the film's events, that film has the power to persuade.

In order to understand the communicative interaction of film and audience better, it is also necessary to carefully analyze the special qualities of film as a visual medium. D. W. Griffith phrased this succinctly saying of his films, "The task I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see." Yet, what an audience sees is the product of the filmmakers. V. I. Pudovkin,

the Russian director, observed, "The lens of the camera replaces the eye of the observer." What the camera reveals may be quite different from the natural event. The filmmakers may be bound by respect for physical reality, but they are unbound by the vision of any one spectator; consequently, the lens may become an unrealistic eye, unbound by natural observation causing the eye of the spectator to become omniscient.

Film conveys its meaning through images and motion, but it is, of course, a multi-sensory experience. A film makes its statement through composition, color, sound, rhythm, and pace. Thus, it is a combination of sight and sound and movement. The visual picture and the sound track engulf the eyes, ears, and mind simultaneously. The motion of film is fascinating; it is a constant flow of movement. The flow of successive images attracts the viewers, induces them to pay attention, not to lose anything of that flow. The motion of film causes the audience to move along with the subjects inside the frame as well as from scene to scene, linking the viewer to the action on the screen.

Sight and sound techniques in film can be extremely manipulative in producing responses from an audience. Petric says, "It is possible to change the ideological impact of a specific sequence by the least prolongation or contraction of the duration of the event it depicts."[31] Film can create its own time and space, moving time forward or back, making things too high, too near, too far. The camera can move in for a close-up shot for intimacy, or it can pull back in a long shot for detachment. The lens of the camera can sharpen or blur an image. Focus can isolate characters, suggest an emotional state, and influence the audience's attitude toward the subject on the screen. For example, in A Woman Under the Influence, the mother-in-law standing on screen left tells the doctor standing on screen right that Mabel, who is in screen center, is a "nothing." Immediately after the word "nothing" is spoken, the focus on Mabel totally blurs her image into nothing while the mother-in-law and doctor remain in sharp focus. The effect is stunning.

These and many other technical aspects of filmmaking are at the disposal of the filmmaker and enable him to determine what and how the viewers perceive a film. One of the significant results is the point of view or the perspective from which a story is told. The camera provides the point of view, for it reveals only those details and actions which the filmmaker wants to reveal to the viewers. Point of view determines the position of the viewers and tells them where they are. It lets them know whether they are spectators or participants in events such as fist fights, sports events, or car chases. It determines the side they take in clashes or conflicts. It influences their perception and attitude toward certain characters.

In Frederick Wiseman's High School, a documentary film done in the cinéma vérité style, the camera follows a principal down the high school corridor so the audience can watch him peer into a window. Wiseman then cuts to a women's gym class and a close-up of a young woman's buttocks and legs creating the effect that the principal has ulterior, lecherous motives. This is the effect of montage, joining two or more pieces of film in such a way that the sum total of meaning is greater than the meaning in the individual parts. In the typical Western chase scene, the hero pursues the outlaw and both are shown

separately, but the juxtaposition of the two separate shots gives the illusion of suspense and chase.

The subjective camera tells the viewers not only what they are seeing but also how they should react. Hitchcock uses the technique of first showing us a film character looking at something; second, he cuts to what the character sees, and then he cuts back to the character and shows us his or her reaction. This influences the audience to react in a like manner. Camera angles also influence the audience's perception of the information in given shots. Low camera angles cause the subject to loom out over the spectator, whereas high angles reduce the subject's size and cause diminishment of the subject in the minds of the viewers.

Michael Ritchie, in his film The Art of the Impossible, shows us how the filmmaker forces the audience to suspend disbelief.[32] He demonstrates how in his film Downhill Racer he forced the audience to believe that a skier won a race in an impossible situation. In reality, there was no way that the skier could have crossed over in front of his competitor to beat him to the finish line, yet through the editing process he does. The audience sees this and believes it. Ritchies says, "We see because we want to see." He demonstrates how the subjective camera, montage, and sound together with identification with the audience and a knowledge of the audience's predispositions produce a persuasive impact. Ritchie says that it is not a matter of "Seeing is believing," but rather "Believing is seeing." He shows us that the director and his associates choose what the viewers see on the screen, and the viewers willingly accept it, not as a record of reality, but as a recreation of reality dependent upon human vision.

It is the human vision of both sender and receiver in the communicative process which produces the persuasive impact. To understand what produces persuasive impact, the rhetorical critic looks beyond reality and examines the symbols of persuasion. The symbols chosen to persuade are the social reality, and the rhetorical analyst examines the symbols in order to locate both the imparted and the received meaning. We can examine the symbols in a film and thus examine the social relationships, the motives, and the qualitative impact of the symbolic world as though it were the substance of social reality for those people who participate in the filmic experience.

The visual symbol is the constitutive element of film. Through distinctive management of the technical resources of the medium of film, filmmakers create symbolic images which relay meaning to audiences. Film symbols can be relatively simple or extremely complicated, but whatever they are they are dependent upon the kind of meaning which the audience gives to them through active involvement with them and the events which surround them. The audience determines for itself how symbols are used and what they represent.

Symbols are elaborate, contemplative, value-laden, and ideational entities. They are intentional meaning vehicles that have a primary conceptual-referential function of calling to mind and referring to something. In short, a symbol is something which stands for something else. It refers to anything other than itself by bringing to mind the idea of that thing.

Eric Fromme said that a symbol is a "kind of something outside ourselves; that which it symbolizes is something inside ourselves." A symbol is richly suggestive and is characterized by a variety of possible meanings. Film can present a symbol simultaneously with the thing, or it can cut from the thing to the symbol or from the symbol to the thing.

For example, in Citizen Kane, the audience sees Kane in his magnificent estate, Xanadu, a contemporary palace which Kane has spent much of his lifetime building. The estate is ponderous but empty and lonely, a symbol for Kane's own life. In the film Oliver Twist, Bill Sikes owns what must be the meanest dog on earth, an object of fear and dread. When Bill beats his wife, the camera holds on the dog, which is trying to leave the room. It appears that the dog cannot stand to watch the beating. The derived meaning is that the beating must be exceptionally cruel.

At one time, films employed symbols for acts which the motion picture code prevented from being portrayed on the screen. In Hitchcock's To Catch A Thief, the audience sees Cary Grant and Grace Kelly in an embrace and then it sees a series of cuts to fireworks which seem to get larger and brighter each time. Other symbolic representations for sex and passion have been waves crashing on the beach, trains rushing through the night, flames leaping in a fireplace, and coffee pots boiling over in the kitchen.

Objects and animals have often been used to symbolize human feelings, character traits, and events in films. The main character Benjamin in The Graduate suffocates under his parents' aspirations for him. Suffocation is not unlike drowning, and the film represents his suffocation-drowning with Benjamin under water in the swimming pool peering through the water at his parents and friends. Another example occurs in Serpico where Frank Serpico has many objects and animals which reveal his character. His pets--a sheepdog, a mouse, a cockatoo--are white as is the décor in his apartment. White is color symbolism for purity, thus symbolically representing Serpico's honesty and integrity. His character transformation is symbolized through his change in appearance. Gradually, his clothing and hairstyle change in the film from a policeman's uniform to loose, embroidered shirts and his hair from short to long with a beard, symbolizing his growing non-conformity. In Sounder, the dog Sounder is cruelly shot and runs off to the woods. When he returns home, he is hurt and crippled. The father is unfairly imprisoned, and he, too, returns home much later, hurt and crippled. The dog symbolically foreshadowed the father's fate.

As we can see, a symbol is a representation whereas an archetype is a pattern from which copies are made. An archetype reflects cultural patterns which reveal and shape man's psychic and social life. Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist, believed that although archetypes may take on innumerable forms, their essential patterns grow out of man's nature as a social, psychological and biological being. Jung believed that the archetype is universal and that its expression is as meaningful to a Bantu tribesman as it is to an advertising executive. People react to an archetype because it stimulates an image already in their collective unconscious. Archetypes depict some eternal quality, some enduring feature of the human race.

Some archetypes are the hero, the scapegoat, the outcast, the devil, star-crossed lovers, the earthmother, the temptress, the ideal woman, and the unfaithful wife. Archetypes can also be situations such as the quest, the task, the initiation, the journey, the fall, and rebirth and salvation. Archetypes can also be color, light, places and vegetation.

Archetypes are used frequently in film. For example, women in film tend to fall into the categories of ideal woman, temptress, earthmother, and unfaithful wife. Train stations are often settings in films and are archetypes of separation and the renunciation of passion. Other examples are a blind person as an archetype for the all-seeing eye, a bridge as an archetype for a change or passage, light as an archetype for wisdom and knowledge, water as an archetype for the unconscious, and a tree as an archetype for life and immortality.

As archetypes recreate the spiritual progenitors of the present, each generation recognizes itself and responds emotionally. This can be another source of persuasion in film, indeed, a powerful source because it operates on an unconscious level.

I have tried to answer the questions, "What and how does film communicate?"; yet, I have, in fact, only introduced some answers. We need to go further in an analysis of film through the concept of identification, the special visual qualities of film, and its symbols and archetypes to help us sort out what meaning the filmmaker is trying to convey as well as the methods through which it is conveyed. Through such analysis, we can attempt to understand the communicative bond between the audience as receiver and the filmmakers as senders of messages. Analysis of film helps some not only to understand its depths but also to reveal it as an important communication medium of persuasive messages.

Footnotes

[1]Thomas Meehan, "He Makes Movies that Make Money," The New York Times, 27 July 1975, p. 9, col. 1.

[2]Charles Higham, "Why Stix Nix Big Pix," The New York Times, 12 October 1975, p. 13, col. 7.

[3]Ernest Lindgren, The Art of the Film (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 20.

[4]George W. Linden, Reflections on the Screen (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1970), p. 20.

[5]Hugh D. Duncan, Communication and Social Order (New York: Bedminister Press, 1962), pp. 86-87.

[6]Béla Balázs, Theory of the Film (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 17.

[7]Paul Rotha, Documentary Film (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 54.

[8]Vladimir Petric, "Film in the Battle of Ideas," Arts in Society, 10 (1973), 234.

[9]Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York: Signet, 1964), p. 257.

[10]Ronald H. Carpenter and Robert V. Seltzer, "Nixon, Patton, and a Silent Majority Sentiment about the Vietnam War: The Cinematographic Bases of a Rhetorical Stance," Central States Speech Journal, 25 (1974), 105.

[11]Carpenter and Seltzer, p. 106.

[12]Jacob P. Mayer, Sociology of Film (London, Faber and Faber, 1946), p. 267.

[13]See Anthony Schillaci, "Film as Environment," in Perspectives on the Study of Film, ed. John S. Katz (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), p. 220 where he refers to a "recent" survey but does not identify it. I regularly give open-ended survey questions to the students in my filmic persuasion classes. Two frequent responses have been: "I go to the movies for self-discovery" and "Because a film gives me and my date something important to talk about."

[14]Schillaci, p. 220.

[15]William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, "Can You Learn About Sex from Movies?," Redbook, April, 1975, p. 68.

[16]Franklin Fearing, "Influence of the Movies on Attitudes and Behavior," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, No. 254 (1947), 70-79, rpt. in Sociology of Mass Communications, ed. Denis McQuail (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972), p. 119.

[17]Fearing in McQuail, p. 126.

[18]Fearing in McQuail, pp. 123-124.

[19]Herbert Blumer, Movies and Conduct (New York: Macmillan, 1933). See also Herbert Blumer and Philip Hauser, Movies, Delinquency, and Crime (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

[20]Ruth C. Peterson and L.L. Thurstone, Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children (New York: MacMillan, 1933).

[21]M. Wiese and S. Cole, "A Study of Children's Attitudes and the Influence of a Commercial Motion Picture," Journal of Psychology, 21 (1946), pp. 151-171.

[22]M. Keilhacker, "Results of Recent Psychological and Pedagogical Research on the Protection of Youth and the Cinema," (in German) Jugend und Film (Munich, 1958), pp. 13-30. See also United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, "Reports and Papers on Mass Communication," The Influence of the Cinema on Children and Adolescents (Paris: UNESCO, 1961).

[23]L. Berkowitz, R. Corwin, and M. Heironimus, "Film Violence and Subsequent Aggressive Tendencies," Public Opinion Quarterly, 27 (1963), 229.

[24]Leonard Berkowitz, Aggression: A Social Psychological Analysis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), p. 255.

[25]A. Bandura, J. E. Grusec, and F. Menlove, "Observational Learning as a Function of Symbolization and Incentive Set," Child Development, 37 (1966), 499-506. See also, Albert Bandura, Dorthea Ross, and Sheila Ross, "Imitation of Film-Mediated Aggressive Models," Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 66 (1963), 3-11.

[26]L. Berkowitz, "The Contagion of Violence: An S-R Mediational Analysis of some Effects of Observed Aggression," Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 18 (1970), 95-135; L. Berkowitz and E. Rawlings, "Effects of Film Violence on Inhibitions Against Subsequent Aggression," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 66 (1963), 405-412; C. W. Turner and L. Berkowitz, "Identification with Film Aggressor (Covert Role Taking) and Reactions to Film Violence," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 21 (1972), 256-264; William J. McGuire, "The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change," The Handbook of Social Psychology, III, eds. Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), 180-187; P. H. Tannenbaum and E. P. Geer, "Mood Change as a Function of Stress of Protagonist and Degree of Identification in a Film-Viewing Situation," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2 (1965), 612-616; and Walter Weiss, "Effects of the Mass Media of Communication," Handbook of Social Psychology, V, eds. Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), 77-195.

[27]Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 55.

[28]Raymond Durgnat, Films and Feeling (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1971), p.45.

[28]Raymond Durgnat, Films and Feeling (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1971), p. 45.

[29]Petric, p. 238.

[30]Rotha, p. 123.

[31]Petric, p. 236.

[32]Film: The Art of the Impossible (New York: Learning Corporation of America, 1972).